

# Salton Sea

ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION PROGRAM

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# Salton Sea UPDATE

ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION PROGRAM

THE RESOURCES AGENCY  
DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES  
DEPARTMENT OF FISH & GAME

NOVEMBER 2007



## Restoration Plan Update

In 2003 the California Legislature passed the Salton Sea Restoration Act. As directed by the Act, the California Secretary for Resources has prepared a Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for the restoration of the Salton Sea ecosystem. The PEIR included the Ecosystem Restoration Study (ERS) as an appendix. Agencies, the Torres-Martinez Desert Cahuilla Tribe, interest groups, and individuals have submitted approximately 34,000 comment letters in response to the Draft PEIR. All comments were considered by the Resources Agency, and the final reports have now been submitted to the Legislature.

State legislation also required the state to develop a preferred alternative that would achieve, to the maximum extent feasible, the Restoration Objectives, as stated in the Salton Sea Restoration Act (see sidebar). The preferred alternative, called the PEIR Preferred Alternative, was composed of components taken from several alternatives described in the PEIR. In accordance with Fish and Game Code 2081.7, the Secretary for Resources has completed the Salton Sea Ecosystem Restoration Program Preferred Alternative

### Restoration Objectives

- Restoration of long-term stable aquatic and shoreline habitat for the historic levels and diversity of fish and wildlife that depend on the Salton Sea
- Elimination of air quality impacts from the restoration projects
- Protection of water quality

Report and Funding Plan and sent this to the California Legislature. This Salton Sea Update describes the PEIR Preferred Alternative.

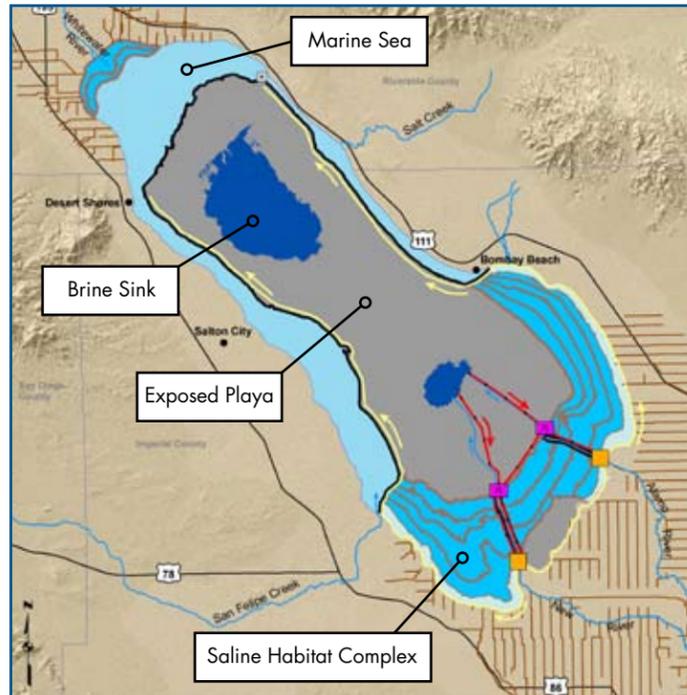
The Draft and Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Reports, the PEIR Certification, and the Salton Sea Ecosystem Restoration Program Preferred Alternative and Funding Plan are available online at <http://www.saltonsea.water.ca.gov>.

For more information, please visit our website at [www.saltonsea.water.ca.gov](http://www.saltonsea.water.ca.gov)

**PEIR Preferred Alternative**

Eight alternatives were evaluated in the Draft PEIR. The PEIR Preferred Alternative includes aspects from many of the alternatives evaluated. The Preferred Alternative consists of several components:

- **Saline Habitat Complex:** A series of 1,000-acre cells would be located in the northern and southern sea beds, each containing a variety of habitat features, such as shoreline, islands, peninsulas, and snags. These features would be used by a variety of shorebirds, wading birds, fish, and invertebrates. Salinity within the complex could range from 20,000 milligrams per liter (mg/L) to 200,000 mg/L. (Typical ocean water salinity is approximately 35,000 mg/L.) Maintaining saline water would reduce vegetation growth, water quality risks, and mosquitoes.
- **Marine Sea:** Formed by the construction of a rock-filled barrier, a marine sea would extend around the northern shoreline from San Felipe Creek to Bombay Beach in a horseshoe shape. The Marine Sea is intended to support a marine fishery and fish-eating birds (such as pelicans, double-crested cormorants, and black skimmers). The water depth in the Marine Sea would stabilize at less than 12 meters (39 feet) to reduce water quality risks and potential fish kills. The Marine Sea would be more than 70 square miles in area.
- **Early Start Habitat:** Full-scale habitat components would require several years to complete. To provide bird habitat during this time, up to 2,000 acres of shallow saline habitat would be established as Early Start Habitat. This habitat could be eliminated or assimilated as other components are constructed.
- **Air Quality Management:** The PEIR Preferred Alternative includes monitoring and evaluation to determine if particulate emissions are present as the dry sea bed (playa) is exposed, and provides methods to control these emissions if they occur. Methods to be considered would include brine stabilization, sand fences, and irrigated-water-efficient vegetation, such as salt bush.
- **Brine Sink:** Located in the center of the exposed playa, the Brine Sink would provide a repository for salts.
- **Exclusion Area for Geothermal Development:** Imperial County has one of the larger known geothermal resource areas in the world, which includes lands near the southern shoreline of the Salton Sea. The PEIR Preferred Alternative includes an area for geothermal development.



**Facts and Figures**

Saline Habitat Complex = 62,000 acres

Marine Sea = 45,000 acres  
(twice the size of Lake Havasu)

- Formed by 2022
- Stable water surface elevation of -230 feet mean sea level
- Salinity between 30,000 and 40,000 mg/L
- Surface area of more than 70 square miles

Exposed Playa = 106,000 acres

Brine Sink = 17,000 acres  
(salinity less than 200,000 mg/L until 2027)

Barriers = 52 miles

Berms = 158 miles

**Where Are We Now?**

The PEIR Preferred Alternative was presented to the Legislature in May 2007. To move forward, the Legislature needs to endorse an alternative and identify a governing structure for its implementation. Senator Ducheny has sponsored Senate Bill 187, which would appropriate bond funds for Salton Sea restoration activities during the first 5 years and identify a governance structure. The bill is now in Assembly Committee.

This fiscal year, the governor's budget included \$13.3 million for planning and monitoring. The Preferred Alternative Report and Funding Plan recommended that a Five-Year Plan be started to continue stakeholder coordination to collect data and resolve issues that could not be fully evaluated during completion of the PEIR.

Specific actions recommended for the Five-Year Plan include these tasks:

- Implement the Demonstration Project and Early Start Habitat
- Conduct biological data collection and monitoring
- Conduct inflow, water quality, and sediment quality investigations
- Conduct air quality investigations
- Conduct geotechnical and hazard surveys and analyses
- Evaluate construction methods and materials (including rock source selection)
- Coordinate with the Torres-Martinez Desert Cahuilla Tribe and other stakeholders
- Execute land access and utility agreements
- Prepare project-level environmental documentation and final design
- Conduct construction bidding

The Five-Year Plan would complete these tasks as part of three major components:

- **Proposed Demonstration Project:** An initial pilot project may be developed at the Department of Fish and Game's nearby pond. Site characteristics would be reviewed, goals and objectives would be established, and California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) review and permitting would be completed prior to implementing an approved project.
- **Proposed Early Start Habitat:** The Early Start Habitat would allow full-scale pilot habitat evaluation. Information learned from the demonstration project and other concurrent pilot projects conducted by the USGS and the Torres-Martinez Desert Cahuilla Tribe could contribute to the design. Environmental documentation, permitting, and several design phases would be completed.
- **Monitoring and Assessment Program:** Focused Technical Groups would be established to identify goals and objectives, coordinate efforts, and initiate important baseline monitoring.
- **Focused Technical Groups** consisting of scientists and other stakeholders have been formed to focus on addressing specific technical issues, including air quality, water quality and hydrology, geology and geography, biology, socioeconomics, and data management. Work by these groups is already under way.

**Next Steps and Future Meetings**

The next round of public meetings will be held on December 11 and 12. We look forward to, and encourage, your participation.

December 11, 2007	December 11, 2007	December 12, 2007	December 12, 2007
<b>Bombay Beach</b>	<b>Brawley</b>	<b>Palm Desert</b>	<b>Salton City</b>
1:00-3:00 p.m.	6:00-8:00 p.m.	1:00-3:00 p.m.	6:00-8:00 p.m.
Bombay Beach Community Services District 9590 Avenue C	Elks Lodge #1420 161 South Plaza	Coachella Valley Association of Governments 73-710 Fred Waring Drive Suite 200	West Shores Senior Center 1375 Borrego Salton Seaway (S-22)

If you have questions, please contact us at (760) 200-9158.